

Combat Missions

FROM GIOIA DEL COLLE

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THE DEMISE OF JESSE JAMES:

[7 JULY 1944](#) Blechhammer, Germany—North Synthetic Oil Refinery

Date: 30 Jan 1944

MISSION # 1 Base: Gioia del Colle

TARGET: Fier, Albania—Radar Station

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: none

BOMBS: 8 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 20,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: none

FLAK: none

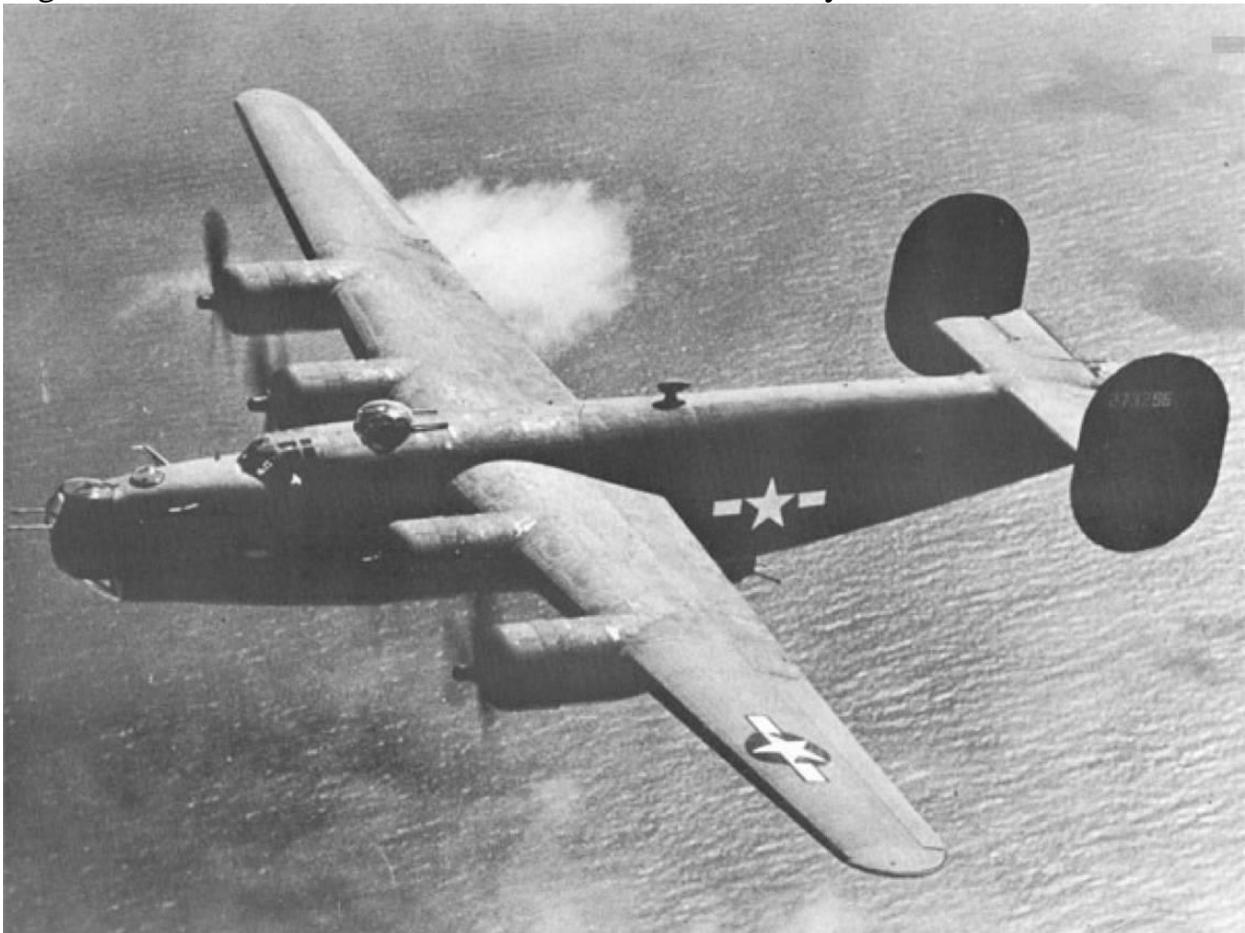
RESULTS: Missed the target by 15 miles

SORTIES: 1 Total: 1

MISSION TIME: 5:15 Total: 5:15

NARRATIVE: Our first combat mission. Before takeoff our copilot, Lew Steward, passed out the escape kits: small waterproof packets containing \$48 in U.S. gold seal currency; halizone tablets to purify drinking water and a small rubber bag to carry water in; a small compass; a hard bar of “desert” chocolate (would not melt even at desert temperatures); and some beautiful silk maps.

Could not see the target from 20,000 feet so didn't hit it. No opposition of any kind. No fighters, no flak, lots of sweat and I am now officially a combat man. I was so nervous expecting fighters. I didn't know I could sweat so much at 30 degrees below zero. It seems these missions will be easy.



15th Air Force B-24 over water 1944

Date: 2 Feb 1944

MISSION # 2 Base: Gioia del Colle

TARGET: Durazzo, Albania—Radar Station

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: RAF Spitfires

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 18,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: 1 ME-109

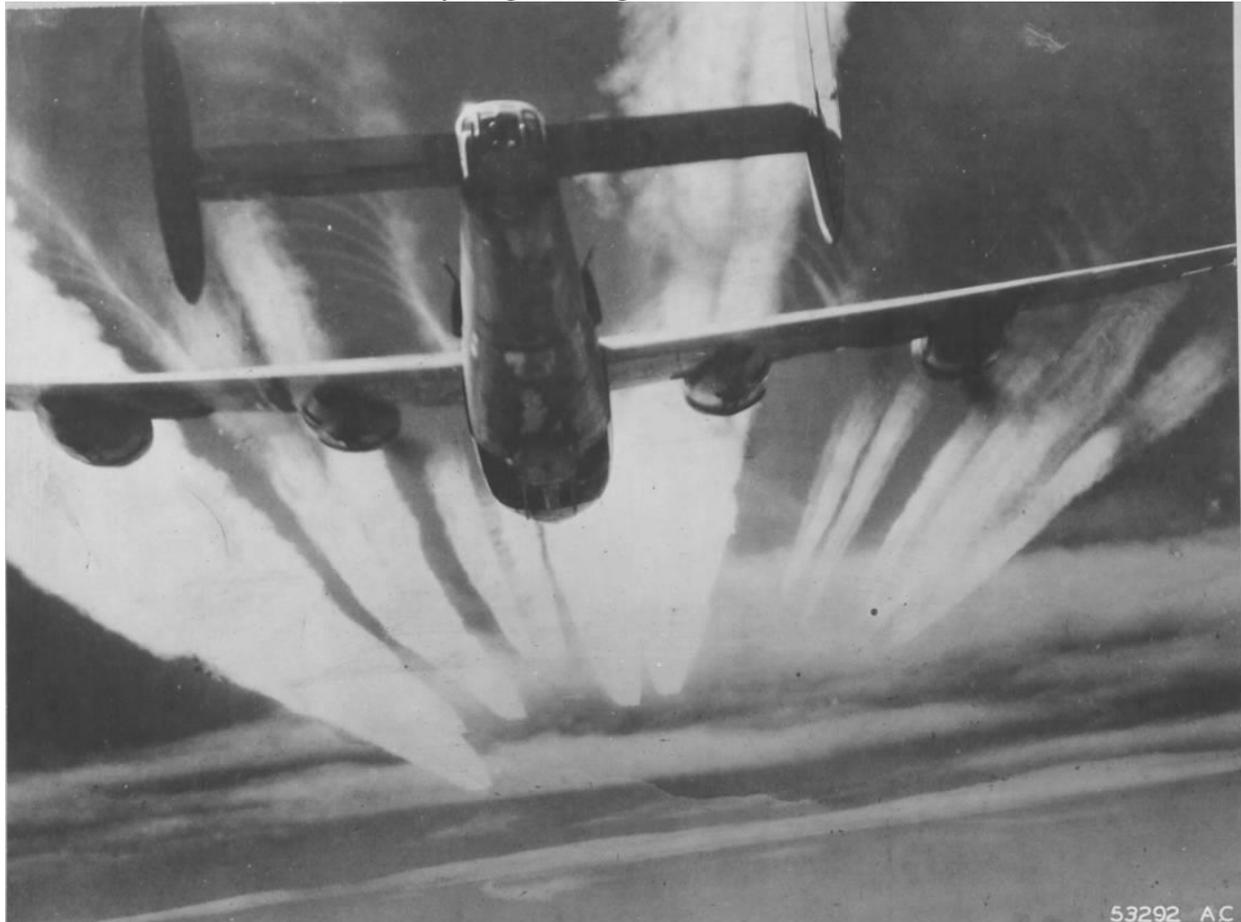
FLAK: Moderate Volume, Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber

RESULTS: Blew the radar station clear off the map.

SORTIES: 1 Total: 2

MISSION TIME: 4:15 Total: 9:30

NARRATIVE: Target was very close to Durazzo Harbor. One ME-109 sighted but the Spitfires drove it off. The RAF Spitfires share the base at Gioia del Colle. One B-24 in our squadron, PISTOL PACKIN MAMMA (41-29175), crashed on landing because of a flak punctured tire. Another came back with the hydraulic system shot out, but made it. Two men in the 727th squadron were shot up by anti-aircraft fire. The flak was very frightening.



53292 A.C.

Vapor trails point right to the B-24 formation for the flak gunners 1944



Durazzo, Albania Radar Station, 2 February 1944

Date: 3 Feb 1944

MISSION # 3 Base: Gioia del Colle

TARGET: Arrezo, Italy—Marshalling Yard

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: None

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 19,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: 6 ME-109's. Two ME-109's with yellow spinners attacked single B-24 just west of Rome. The abortive B-24 dove into clouds and evaded the fighters.

FLAK: Light Volume, Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber

RESULTS: Returned bombs to base due to complete overcast over target.

SORTIES: 1 Total: 3

MISSION TIME: 6:45 Total: 16:15

NARRATIVE: We lurched down the short, sloppy runway, plastering the underside of our ship with mud. Rendezvoused with 450th and 449th bomb groups but due to weather they became separated and bombed secondary target. Saw about 6 ME-109's observing us but none came in for the attack. This made me as nervous as if there were no fighters. Again I was sweating in the cold.



Muddy airfield in southern, "sunny" Italy early 1944

12 Feb & 14 Feb 1944

Aborted Missions—Time: 2:50 & 3:10

It is tough going for the invading American forces at Anzio and we were scheduled to fly support missions, dropping anti-personnel type bombs. It seemed to rain a great deal and our missions to help were "stood down" (cancelled) for days due to weather, when it seemed they needed us most. Heavy rain kept us grounded. And

the field was getting in bad shape. Operations were becoming difficult, especially takeoff and landing. We got our mud-splattered ships into the air to attack a supply dump at the Anzio Beachhead on the 12th and Ferrara Marshalling Yard on the 14th but had to return early due to bad weather.



Ground crew struggles in the rain, southern Italy early 1944

Date: 15 FEB 1944

MISSION # 4 Base: Gioia del Colle

TARGET: Siena, Italy—Marshalling Yard

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: None

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 20,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: Two radial engine enemy flew alongside us over Anzio. They climbed above our formation and dropped a bomb through the formation.

FLAK: Moderate Volume, Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber.

RESULTS: None—due to cloud cover.

SORTIES: 1 Total: 4

MISSION TIME: 5:30 Total: 21:45

NARRATIVE: We flew without escort and without other groups. Our mission was to stop enemy troop and supply movement toward our infantry and artillery soldiers who were stuck on the Anzio beachhead. Reaching the target area, it was covered by cloud and ground haze. And the second section, stacked up, was blinded by the vapor trails of the first section. This all made for a poor bombing visibility. We can only pray for better weather so our missions will be more successful.

And on the way to the IP, the flak was thick—just black. When the shout went up about the black puffs I just turned my turret and crossed my fingers. SAKINSHACK was being bounced around like a rubber ball. I believe both the Germans and the Americans were shooting at us.



15th Air Force above the clouds 1944

Date: 22 FEB 1944

MISSION # 5 Base: Gioia del Colle

TARGET: Messerschmitt Assembly Plant at the Airdrome near Obertraubling, Regensburg, Germany

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: none

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 21,000 feet.

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: This is our first real fight with enemy aircraft. 25 to 30 ME-109's and 10 to 15 FW-190's attacked in Regensburg area, near Klagenfurt and at Graz. The enemy aircraft came up through the clouds in formations of 6 to 8 then broke off in pairs which joined at 4, 5, and 7 o'clock high, diving under formation going into a wide sweeping turn. Attack followed from all angles. All of our gunners opened up. We had quite a fight on our hands for 40 minutes. Several of the enemy aircraft were shot down. Some ME-109's had yellow cowling with white spinners, FW-190's had yellow diamond shaped designs on cowlings with white spinners.

FLAK: Intense Volume, Very Accurate Aim, Barrage Type Heavy Caliber

RESULTS: Weather foul. Complete cloud cover over target. Doubtful if anyone hit target.

SORTIES: 2 Total: 6

MISSION TIME: 8:30 Total: 30:15

NARRATIVE: Flew over the Alps. Saw the Danube River. The rendezvous was snafued and some aircraft ended up in the wrong wave. It was a long haul, our first time to fly over Germany. It was colder than usual even though all of our heated equipment worked. I thought we would never get there, but when we did the target was completely overcast, so we didn't hit it after all. We had to rid our bombs because the weight was causing us to use too much gas. We finally saw a railroad and dropped the bombs (sorry about the little town nearby). It was pretty rough today, but not on us because we stayed in pretty good formation. Enemy fighters sat up at 30,000 feet just waiting for someone to drop out of formation. All of our ships returned. The 376th, 450th, 449th all went. The 449th and the 450th each lost 4 ships. Every group had some cases of severe frostbite. Ran into stinko weather coming home—haze so bad it cut visibility to half a mile—then had to turn to avoid clouds. We finally had to let down to 1500 feet over the Adriatic coming home. I hope we never get involved in such weather again. They are giving us credit for two missions every time we go into Germany. They should since we have to bomb the same targets as the boys from England do, and they fly only 25.



ME-109 in sweeping turn on the attack 1944

Date: 25 FEB 1944

MISSION # 6 Base: Gioia del Colle

TARGET: Regensburg, Germany—Prufening ME109 Aircraft Factory

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: P-38's from the 14th Fighter Group on the way home.

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 22,000 feet.

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: 40 FW-190's, 20 ME-109's, 25 ME-110's, 15 ME-210's

FLAK: Intense Volume, Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber

RESULTS: Destroyed Target.

SORTIES: 2 Total: 8

MISSION TIME: 6:30 Total: 36:45

NARRATIVE: Went back to Regensburg and I was plenty scared. We hit it hard. Even the German radio admitted that we had knocked out 50% of their productive ability, so it is probably more than that. However, it was costly. Our group lost six ships due to fighter attack (724th lost two—PEACEMAKER 42-52101 and

KNOCK IT OFF 42-7765, 725th lost three including WEE WILLIE 42-52167 and THE CITADEL 42-52168, 726th lost one). We were jumped by fighters an hour before we got to the target. Most of the fighters came in on the tail. We were attacked by a couple of 109's. They came in about four o'clock and did not seem to be using any deflection as they came at us but were firing their 20mm cannon directly at us. I could see the guns flashing. I had done pretty well at gunnery school and thought I was a pretty good shot, but the speed at which they came in at us completely confused me; my training had not prepared me for this. From being a mere dot in the sky until they filled the window of the turret, their speed left me amazed. I could see the flashes of the 20mm cannon as they fired, but they were not using deflection when they should have been. Thus, two German fighter pilots and one American Liberator plane and its crew lived to fight another day. Those ME-109's had the yellow noses of Goring's own elite squadron. When it seemed as if they would crash into our plane, they flipped upside-down and dived straight down. On one occasion, three ME-109's followed a crippled B-24 down and the tail gunner remained in his turret and kept shooting until two of the ME-109's went down while the B-24 crashed into the ground (DOUBLE TROUBLE 41-29244 of the 725th squadron.)

Our tail gunner, S/Sgt Israel Willig, saw one ship go down. "It was flying just behind and above us. It received a hit on the right wing which tore off that part of the wing extending beyond the outboard engine, sending the ship into a steep dive."

As we approached the initial point of the bomb run the aircraft attacks stopped briefly and we were engulfed in a barrage of heavy anti-aircraft fire. The flak was heavy but we didn't lose any ships there. As we approached the target the fighter attacks were the most intense. The guns were singing their tunes. We were very busy fighting off enemy attacks. On the trip from the target area, we were not hampered by enemy aircraft. We weren't due to pick up our fighter escort until about forty-five minutes off the target, so we were really sweating out more fighters. None came up and then we saw our P-38's in the distance. Everybody breathed a sigh of relief. There was never a more welcome sight.

The weather was perfect going to the target, but got much worse on the way home. We had to work through very thick storm clouds in order to keep the formation together. About two hours out we received a message to land at Foggia Main because our base (Gioia del Colle) had been almost washed away. The place is flooded. Ships all landed at different fields. They can't get home. It was the last we saw of our old base. Our crew and our personal effects headed towards a temporary base near San Pancrazio.

Most successful raid ever pulled by the 15th Air Force. Our first attack unit was first over the target and smashed it to bits. We were in the second attack unit leading the third flight (the low flight). The 451st received a Distinguished Unit Citation for this mission.



451st over Regensburg, Germany 25 February 1944



451st over Regensburg, Germany 25 February 1944

Date: 11 Mar 1944

MISSION # 7 Base: San Pancrazio

TARGET: Toulon, France—Submarine Repair Facilities

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: P-38s from the 14th Fighter Group

BOMBS: 5 x 1000 lb. from 20,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: ME-109's and FW-190's

FLAK: Moderate Volume, Inaccurate Aim, Heavy Caliber

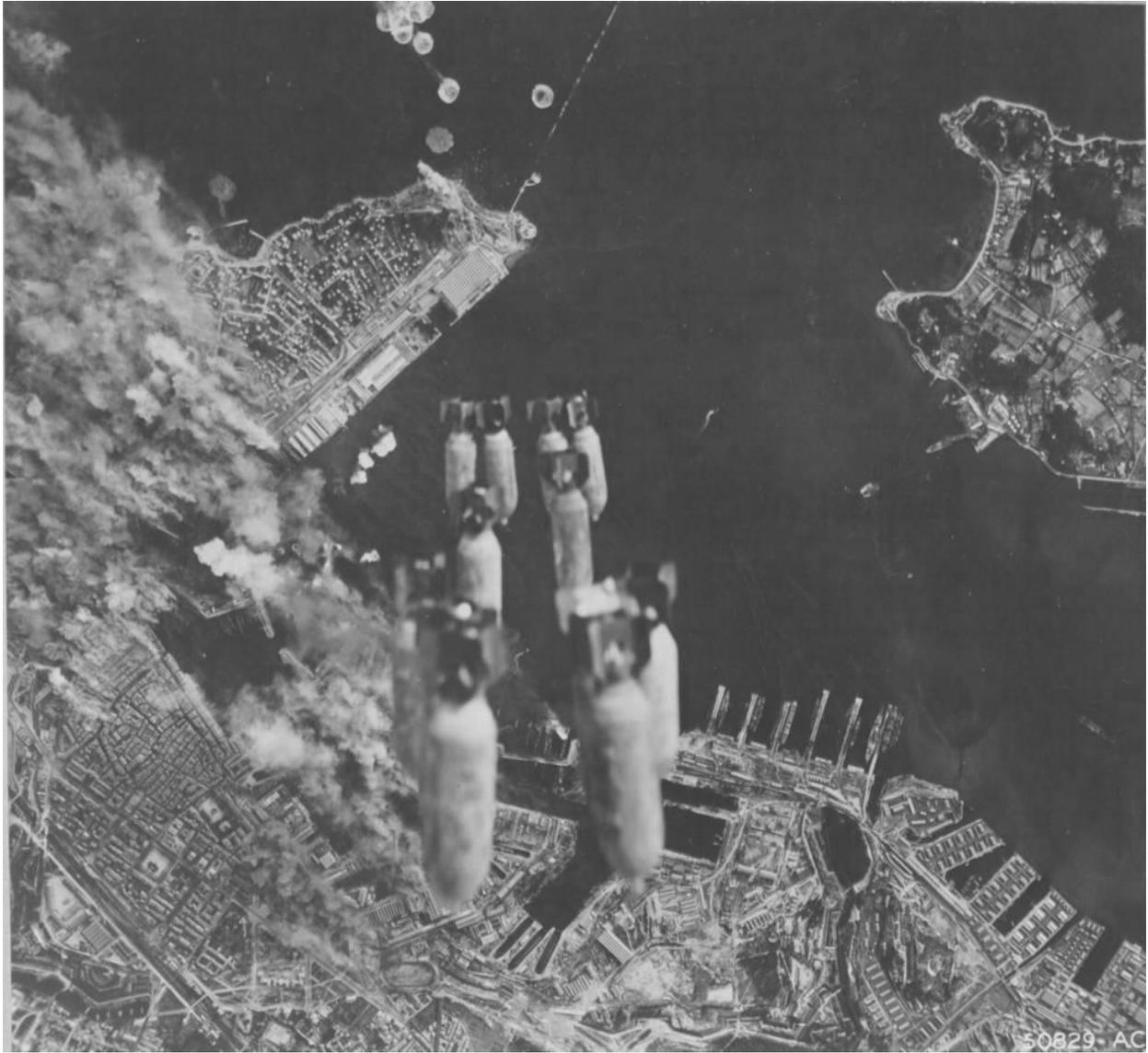
RESULTS: Considerable damage to target—mostly on harbor installations, choke point of marshalling yard and gas works. U-410 confirmed sunk.

SORTIES: 1 Total: 9

MISSION TIME: 7:20 Total: 44:05

NARRATIVE: We're operating from our new base at San Pancrazio. Since I had no early mission chores, I sat on an ammunition box at the left waist gun window, idly watching the formation shuffle around while we passed over Corsica. The formation moved closer together and I got down into my turret as we neared enemy territory. Soon the casual chatter on the intercom tapered off as the crew prepared for the ordeal ahead. The target was partially obscured by smoke pots. Enemy aircraft did not attack until the end of the bomb run. The spurts of yellow flame winking on the leading edges of their wings looked so innocent. But the white streaks from their tracer bullets streaming toward us scared me.

SAKINSHACK shuddered from the concentrated recoil of all 10 of our machine guns being fired at the same time. Our formation leader (PIECEMAKER 42-7725) staggered under the impact of the German fire and exploded. It's frightening looking down from the ball turret position. I could see the flak all around me. I could see the parachutes and damaged planes that had been hit and were out of control, some going down and in flames, some with parachutes flitting out, one by one; some with no chutes appearing. I saw dogfights between P-38's and FW-190's.



Bombs away over Toulon, France



The end of a German Fighter 1944

Date: 15 Mar 1944

MISSION # 8 Base: San Pancrazio

TARGET: Cassino, Italy—Troop Support

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: P-38's from 14th Fighter Group 49th Fighter Squadron

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 17,500 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: none

FLAK: Heavy Volume, Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber.

RESULTS: Some waves dropped bombs on Allied side of the line.

SORTIES: 1 Total: 10

MISSION TIME: 3:35 Total: 47:40

NARRATIVE: Our target was a "choke point", the town of Cassino, along the route to Rome. Enemy troops had dug in there, occupying a hallowed abbey on the top of a mountain overlooking the town below. To the Allies, the town itself was not the objective so much as the hills behind it and the road beyond, which led to Rome.

Crew nine was flying lead for the 451st Bomb Group on this mission. Once in the general area, there were several valleys that all looked alike. The navigator and bombardier were in a discussion as to whether we were in the right place. The plane was going down a valley all the time this discussion was taking place. In a short time the pilot asked what was going on. Before much longer, the Pilot said, "I order you to drop the bombs." We were all waiting on them to drop and we would drop at the same time. As a result, five hundred pound bombs were scattered over a large area.

Later we learned our bombs had been dropped on some New Zealand troops. From that time forward, crew nine flew tail-end Charlie.



The town of Cassino, Italy on the left and Monte Cassino Abbey on the right, 15 March 1944

Date: 17 Mar 1944

MISSION # 9 Base: San Pancrazio

TARGET: Vienna, Austria—Heinkel Aircraft Assembly Installations at Schwechat Airdrome

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: P-38's from 14th Fighter Group 49th Fighter Squadron

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose Bombs from 23,000 feet.

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: none

FLAK: No flak over target some flak en route.

RESULTS: A solid overcast prevented any observations of results.

SORTIES: 2 Total: 12

MISSION TIME: 7:40 Total: 55:20

NARRATIVE: There was haze and scattered cloud cover until Bos Novi after which clouds became solid up to 18,000 feet. There were cirrus clouds up to 25,000 feet. There was a solid overcast over the target area. This prevented any accurate bombing. Clouds were all over and thick and saved us from being jumped by fighters. God bless the clouds. We dropped our bombs 18 miles SW of target. Other flights dropped their bombs on targets of opportunity on route back to base. Some returned their bombs back to base. SMALL FRY (42-52156) of the 726th ditched in the Adriatic due to flak damage. No fighters came up to attack us, and there was no flak over the target so we made out all right, except we were on oxygen so long, and it was pretty cold.



15th Air Force over the clouds, 1944

Date: 19 March 1944

MISSION # 10 Base: San Pancrazio

TARGET: Styer, Austria—Walzergenswerk Ball Bearing Plant
(Bombed secondary target—Aircraft Engine Factory at Graz, Austria)

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: P-47's and P-38's but they turned back 30 minutes from target because of undercast.

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 21,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: 10 to 15 ME-109's and FW-190's

FLAK: Intense Volume, Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber over both Styer and Graz

RESULTS: Some hits on barracks south of railroad bridge

SORTIES: 1 Total: 13

MISSION TIME: 8:00 Total: 63:20

NARRATIVE: Clouds over the original target at Styer, Austria so we turned back. The secondary target, Flugmotorenware in the city of Graz, Austria, showed

through the clouds and we dropped our bombs on the south side of the city. The cloud cover cleared only momentarily. We had to make a short run, aiming at a factory area in the south center of town. The 8/10 cloud cover prevented complete photo coverage and accurate observations.

A group of experienced pilots in ME-109's and FW-109's attacked a few minutes before Graz. They attacked from the rear both high and low, attacking in elements of two abreast, breaking off on the right side after firing their cannons. Then they would reform high above and to the rear of our formation waiting for stragglers damaged by flak. The flak was heavy and we flew through it twice—the second time so the Colonel could take pictures of it. The interphone went out on the ball turret leaving me in a world of my own.



15th Air Force tight formation 1944

Date: 28 MARCH 1944

MISSION # 11 Base: San Pancrazio

TARGET: Mestre, Italy—Marshalling Yards

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: Twelve P-38's from the 14th Fighter Group 49th Squadron

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 19,500 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: 6 ME-109's sighted

FLAK: Not much. Slight Volume, Inaccurate Aim, Heavy Caliber

RESULTS: Excellent strikes observed on target, with bombs falling in an effective pattern.

SORTIES: 1 Total: 14

MISSION TIME: 7:00 Total: 70:20

NARRATIVE: Snow today. The ground crew told me two ships had frozen bomb bay doors at preflight. We flew over Venice, city of canals. No encounters with fighters but some were sighted over the target. Fire and smoke came from explosions in oil or gasoline tank cars on the tracks. The entire marshalling yard was a mass of smoke and flame as we turned and left the target area. I don't think I'll ever get warm again.



Southern Italy, spring 1944



Southern Italy, spring 1944

Date: 29 March 1944

MISSION # 12 Base: San Pancrazio

TARGET: Bolzano, Italy—Marshalling Yard (The main rail line between Italy and Germany, near the Brenner Pass and at a high elevation.)

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: Ten P-38's from the 14th Fighter Group 49th Squadron

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. Demolition Bombs from 21,000 feet.

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: 12 ME-109's seen near Padova, 10 ME-109's near Verona, and 10 ME-109's near Prento while just off target. None of these aircraft made any attacks on our formation as the top cover provided by the P-38's proved too effective. God bless our little friends—the P-38's.

FLAK: Intense Volume, Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber

RESULTS: Target was well covered with hits near the bridges and in the marshalling yard. Photo showed ten direct hits at choke point of marshalling yard. Bridges looked severely damaged. The entire target was smoke covered as our formation made its rally.

SORTIES: 1 Total: 15

MISSION TIME: 6:00 Total: 76:20

NARRATIVE: As we approached the Yugoslavia coastline from Adriatic Sea the cumulus clouds were built up to 30,000 feet. We were not able to get above the

clouds. This particular day, the plan was to fly through these clouds in formation. It seems like we were in the clouds for hours, but it couldn't have been very long. We could not see the planes in formation off our wingtips. That will make an old man out of you fast. Upon coming out of the clouds, B-24s were circulating around like a stirred-up hornet's nest.

This mission took us over some of the most ruggedly beautiful country in Europe, with the Swiss border and safety only a few miles to the north of the target. HOBO QUEEN (42-64353) of the 725th didn't come back.



15th Air Force coming out of the clouds 1944

Date: 30 March 1944

MISSION # 13 Base: San Pancrazio

TARGET: Sofia, Bulgaria—Marshalling Yard & Industrial Area

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: 12 P-38's from the 14th Fighter Group 49th Squadron

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 20,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: 11 ME-109's and 2 FW-190's

FLAK: Moderate Intensity, Fairly Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber

RESULTS: Strings of bombs across choke point at end of marshalling yard and several hits on building adjacent to marshalling yard

SORTIES: 1 Total: 16

MISSION TIME: 5:40 Total: 82:00

NARRATIVE: The temperature was minus 30 degrees Celsius, and it was cold. We were well covered by P-38's so we enjoyed the mountainous scenery on the way over. The enemy fighters came at us after the bomb run. They came from 4 to 6 o'clock and the ones that came close enough were shot down. The P-38's kept most of the enemy aircraft away from us. The front of my Mae West was covered with a sheet of ice where the warm-breath exhaust from my oxygen mask had condensed, dripped and quickly frozen.

I saw LONESOME POLECAT (42-52114) of the 726th come home with the nose gunner killed. Their ship had to feather an engine, drop out of formation and was attacked by enemy aircraft. The attack started at 21,000 feet but the B-24 was followed down to 2,000 feet as they sought the protection of a cloud formation. They were successful in escaping. The aircraft was severely damaged by machine gun and explosive cannon fire. And the nose gunner, Sgt. Andrew Wirtzberger... I talked to him this morning about his electric suit. I saw the ship coming in for a landing. My heart sunk. I could see him lying against the guns. It seems a 20mm shell did the works from a ME-109.



Sofia, Bulgaria 30 March 1944

Date: 3 April 1944

MISSION # 14 Base: San Pancrazio

TARGET: Budapest, Hungary—Marshalling Yard

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: Fifteen P-47's (325th Fighter Group—Checker Tails) up to the initial point of the bomb run and twelve P-38's (14th Fighter Group 49th Squadron) met us a few minutes after our rally.

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 20,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: 15-20 ME-109's, 5 FW-190's, 4 JU-88's, 1 ME-210

FLAK: Intense Volume, Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber over target. Also flak encountered over Sarajevo, Szekesfehervar and Dubrovnik.

RESULTS: Well placed hits in center of marshalling yard.

SORTIES: 2 Total: 18

MISSION TIME: 8:00 Total: 90:00

NARRATIVE: Smoke screens in target area so it was partially obscured. But the target was hit well with hits on choke point and in center of marshalling yard.

There was a great explosion and fire caused by hits on the adjacent oil refinery. And a large fire started in a factory building.

While still 34 minutes from the target a cruising formation of 15 to 20 ME-109's were seen flying higher and to the right of our formation. No attacks were made. Trailing slightly were 2 JU-88s at a higher level who seemed to be directing the flight. Then our P-47 escort reached their fuel limit and left us, leaving me with a feeling of despair. Actual attacks started just before the target when 5 FW-190's approached from the rear, but stayed back and fired 20mm cannon without closing. Attacks then increased in intensity up to the target and as our formation rallied. ME-109's and FW-190's attacked from 3 and 9 o'clock diving underneath while JU-88's closed in at 5 and 7 o'clock breaking off on either side. Then with a flood of relief, I spotted our P-38 escort coming to shepherd us home. The enemy attacked after the P-47's left us before the target and before the P-38's arrived. Without our fighter escort the enemy attacks would have been much worse.



15th Air Force 325th Fighter Group P-47 escort, Italy 1944



15th Air Force over Budapest, Hungary 3 April 1944

Date: 5 April 1944

MISSION # 15 Base: San Pancrazio

TARGET: Ploesti, Romania—Marshalling Yards and Astra Oil Refinery

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: 30 P-38's from the 14th Fighter Group—supposed to meet them on the way back but they got tied up with enemy aircraft over Yugoslavia and didn't make the rendezvous.

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 20,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: 50-60 ME-109's & FW-190's, 10-20 JU-88's, & 10 ME-110's

FLAK: Very Intense Volume, Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber over target.

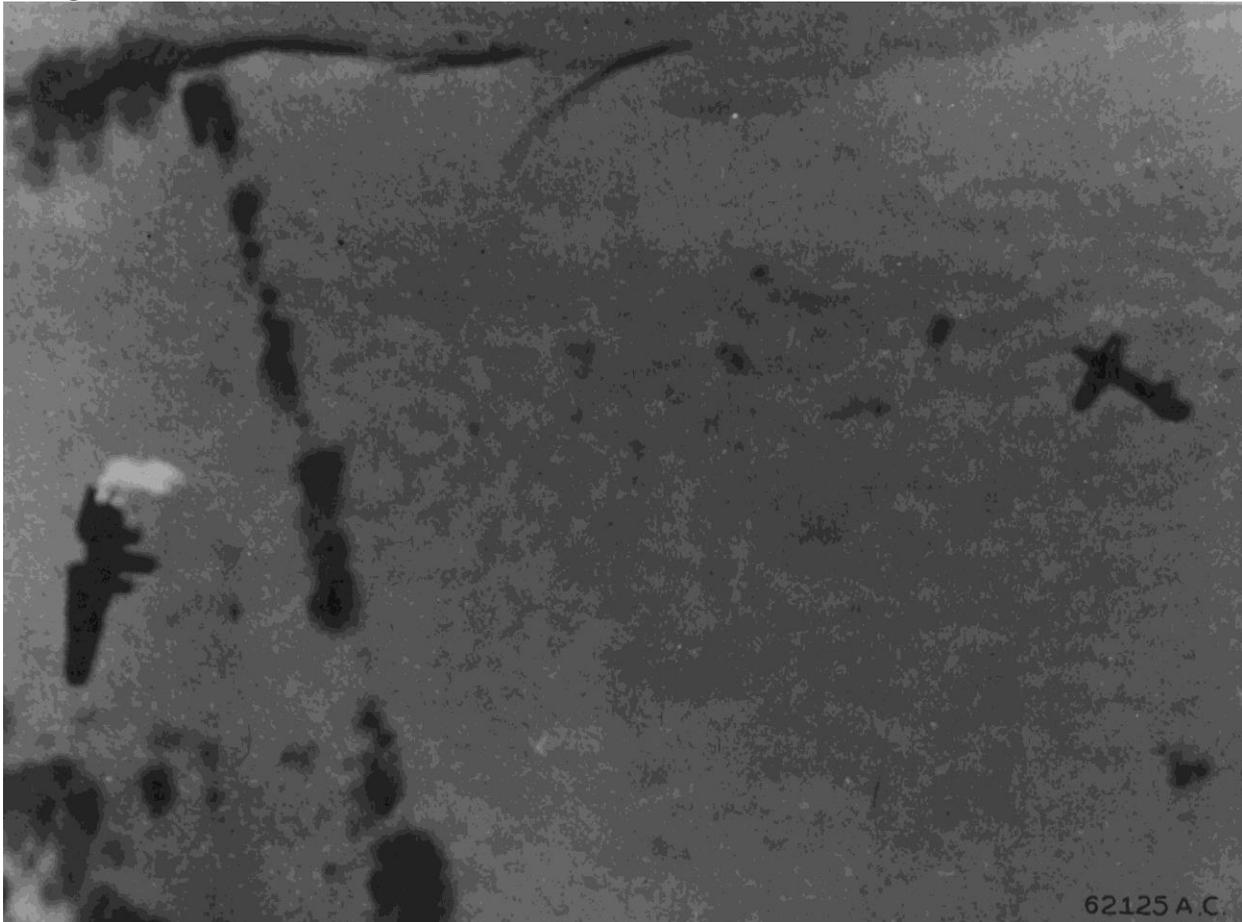
RESULTS: Target area well covered with much damage done. Smoke pot screen was somewhat effective but our attack caused fires and explosions from hits on storage tanks and enormous explosions from hits on refinery. Fires also caused by hits on tank car loading station and tank cars. There were several direct hits on installations at marshalling yard, on railroad overpass and north choke point.

SORTIES: 2 Total: 20

MISSION TIME: 7:00 Total: 97:00

NARRATIVE: First high altitude raid on Ploesti. We were scared of this mission because of all the known flak guns in the area. We led the high flight (second flight) of the second attack unit. The flak made my stomach churn.

The enemy fighter pilots were the best I have seen and the most aggressive. The enemy fighters flew through the heavy flak to attack our group. Attacks were made all around the clock, closing to within 50 feet before either pulling up or diving under. Coordinated attacks came from 6 o'clock low by formations of six flying two abreast, closing to 50 to 100 yards and breaking away on either side in a diving turn followed by a split 'S' and then raking the under side of the bombers—my side! The JU-88's would stand off and fire rockets and then close with automatic weapons. These 6 o'clock low attacks came right at me. I tried to fire only short bursts but I was sure I would run out of ammo. Finally, a JU-88 started smoking and went down. The pilot, Garland Jarvis, in the ship behind us confirmed that I had gotten him—a kill.



Death of a German fighter shot apart by a gunner in a 15th Air Force heavy bomber

There were so many B-24's spinning down. I was surprised how fast they spun. Some had chutes coming out. One exploded. I don't think I'll make it through another mission.

Our group lost five B-24's over Ploesti. The lost B-24 from our squadron was a new bomber on its first mission (42-52474). On board as co-pilot was our squadron commander Major Beane. He had taken the place of my friend Paul Jonshoy for this mission. The plane was hit directly by flak while on the bomb run and started to lose altitude. But the pilot, Captain Robert Stone, kept the aircraft on a straight run and dropped his bombs on the target. After turning off the target this plane was aggressively attacked by enemy aircraft and set on fire. Eight chutes were seen to come from the doomed aircraft.



Blazing Liberator of the 15th Air Force (early 451st markings) 1944
The remainder of Stone's scattered middle flight came up and formed up on our flight. All but one of the low flight in the second attack unit had been shot down, including SUPER MOOSE (42-64442), JOLLY ROGER (42-52081) and ST.

PETER'S FERRY (42-7720). These were from the 727th squadron. The lone survivor came up to join us for safety. Now our flight had 12 planes instead of 6. And we were leading the second attack unit. Our pilot, Robert James, after rallying the entire Second attack unit, "cut the corner" of the sweeping right turn to take all planes into formation with the first attack unit during the intense German fighter onslaught. By joining all aircraft quickly no more planes were lost. Robert James received the Distinguished Flying Cross and the 451st received another Distinguished Unit Citation for this mission. WOLF WAGON (42-64449 of the 724th) returned with over 350 holes from flak and German fighters. John O'Conner landed her with all three tires shot out. She came to a stop in three feet of water off the landing strip. My friends in the squadron at Manduria died in an explosion/crash on take-off—their left landing gear collapsed.



450th B-24 over Ploesti 1944



451st B-24 crashes on takeoff, Manduria, Italy 5 April 1944

Date: 13 April 1944

MISSION # 16 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Budapest, Hungary—Vesces Airdrome

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: Rendezvoused with thirty-three P-47's (325th Fighter Group) at 1200.

We were over the target at 1234 and they departed at 1300. Thirty-six P-38's provided high cover from I.P. to target.

BOMBS: 240 x 20 lb. Fragmentation Bombs from 20,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: 10 ME-109's, 5 FW-190's, 5 JU-88's seen in target area.

No fighters attacked our formation.

FLAK: Moderate to Intense Volume, Inaccurate Aim, Heavy Caliber – chaff was dropped from the I.P. and this threw the radar aiming device off. Many bursts were observed 2000 to 5000 feet under the formation.

RESULTS: Target well covered by bomb hits; photo coverage showed 35 fighter and bomber aircraft destroyed on the ground and five damaged.

SORTIES: 2 Total: 22

MISSION TIME: 6:45 Total: 103:45

NARRATIVE: Beautiful weather. We are now operating from our new base at Castelluccio. And we have been moved from the 47th bomb wing to the 49th bomb wing. I saw one B-24 struck by a bomb between number three and number four engines from a group overhead bombing through their formation. And MISS AMERICA (42-52084 of the 727th) was lost to fighter attack.

Now when we return from a mission the Red Cross girls have doughnuts and coffee waiting for us. Not having had much to eat since about 4 am, what they offered really tasted good.

What was even more rejuvenating was the stop by the de-briefing tent. We struggled up to the tent, burdened by our flying gear—parachute, heated suit, fleece lined jacket and boots, goggles, etc., and an empty stomach. We were very tired (going to high altitude always caused exhaustion) and almost unable to struggle along.

But after de-briefing we stopped by the improvised Flight Surgeon's Medicinal Table where we each received a two-ounce shot of whisky—straight, no chaser. After the burning ceased the whole world started to look different; the sun was shining and the air smelled good. It was no effort to pick up that heavy bag of equipment, which a few minutes earlier seemed almost impossible, and to go whistling back to our area.



Vesces Airdrome, Budapest Hungary, 13 April 1944



Red Cross Doughnuts and Coffee, Italy 1944

Date: 16 April 1944

MISSION # 17 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Brasov, Romania—Marshalling Yard

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: Ten P-38's from Uylce to the initial point of the bomb run. Twelve P-47's (325th Fighter Group—Checker Tails) were picked up in vicinity of Turnu-Severin on route back.

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose Bombs from 21,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: Approximately 5 minutes after leaving target 20 to 30 enemy aircraft attacked. These consisted of ME-109's and Fw-190's and they attacked very aggressively for about 25 minutes.

FLAK: Moderate Volume, Inaccurate Aim, Heavy Caliber. Four guns were noted about 700 yards NNW of north corner of Brasov airfield, and also several guns just across the Timisul River about the center of the NE side of the airfield.

RESULTS: Target area well covered with excellent concentration of bombs at aiming point. A huge column of smoke seen from oil fire.

SORTIES: 1 Total: 23

MISSION TIME: 6:00 Total: 109:45

NARRATIVE: The weather at our base is improving again. Now we have another problem—dust on the landing strip will be troublesome in the coming months. The engines will need extra maintenance. Saw a beautiful, circular rainbow on the clouds below us today.

The group attacked Brasov marshalling yard today. Brasov is an important transportation center in Romania and our attack was in support of the advancing Red Army. Fires and smoke seen over entire marshalling yard as formation pulled away.

The enemy fighter attacks were all single from 6 o'clock high, low, and level, and firing 20mm cannon and rockets. They would attack through vapor trails and I couldn't see them until they were fairly close. Several B-24's lost to fighters. Enemy fighters circled the descending parachutes.



Brasov, Romania 16 April 1944



15th Air Force over Brasov, Romania 16 April 1944



15th Air Force over Brasov, Romania 16 April 1944



15th Air Force over Brasov, Romania 16 April 1944
Date: 20 April 1944

MISSION # 18 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri
TARGET: Ferrara, Italy—Marshalling Yard

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: P-38's

BOMBS: 12 x 500 lb. General Purpose

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: none

FLAK: Slight Volume, Inaccurate Aim. Heavy Caliber from vicinity of target.

RESULTS: Returned bombs to base due to 10/10 cloud cover at 10,000 feet.

SORTIES: 1 Total: 24

MISSION TIME: 5:30 Total: 115:15

NARRATIVE: Clouds and our escort saved us from being jumped by enemy fighters. There was nothing to save us from the bone chilling cold. But the clouds also kept us from dropping our bombs on the target. We returned our bombs. This made for a very nervous landing even though Robert James, our pilot, is excellent. Other pilots jettisoned their bombs over the Adriatic in order make a safe landing.



15th Air Force over the clouds 1944

Date: 23 April 1944

MISSION # 19 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Bad Voslau, Austria—Airdrome and ME-109 Assembly Plant

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: Forty P-38's

BOMBS: 240 x 20 lb. Fragmentation Bombs from 21,000 feet.

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: Twenty-three very aggressive enemy fighters—ME-109's and FW-190's.

FLAK: Intense Volume, Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber

RESULTS: Superior—Target well covered. Aiming point covered with bombs and also entire field.

SORTIES: 2 Total: 26

MISSION TIME: 7:30 Total: 122:45

NARRATIVE: I was awakened at 0300 by the distant roar of engines being run up by the ground crews in a final full-power checkout, and then I lay awake the rest of the night worrying about the target and whether we would come home that evening. Our target was in the Vienna area—lots of flak guns. Many of our B-24's were hard hit by flak, and we had several encounters with enemy fighters. The enemy fighters flew through our formation wildly. Then in graceful pursuit curves from the sides they skidded around in crazy deflection-shot sideslips that kept their cannons bearing on us for endless seconds. The shrapnel from the flak rattled on our aluminum siding like handfuls of gravel thrown on a tin roof but nobody was hurt.

Since we are now in the 49th bomb wing we flew with the 461st and 484th Bomb Groups. We completely sprayed the landing field with fragmentation bombs. The bombing pattern was one of perfection. I don't think it will be necessary to ever return again to that target. We got a commendation from the Wing Commander.



Bad Voslau, Austria 23 April 1944

Date: 29 April 1944

MISSION # 20 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Toulon, France—Naval Base, Submarine Repair Facilities and Arsenal

SHIP: Sakinshack ...256

ESCORT: Rendezvoused with 100 fighters—P-38's (82nd and 14th Fighter Groups) and P-51's (31st Fighter Group) 25 miles southwest of Toulon. They stayed with us over the target and 100 miles out to sea on withdrawal. This is the first time we have had P-51 escorts.

BOMBS: 5 x 1000 lb. General Purpose from 21,000 feet.

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: Eight ME-109's and 3 FW-190's seen in target area, all sky blue color without belly tanks. Our escort kept the enemy aircraft away from us.

FLAK: Intense Volume, Very Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber

RESULTS: Good hits on munitions factory, adjacent buildings and nearby marshalling yard. Marine installations and sub pens took a pounding from a large tonnage of bombs. Very heavy smoke screen and smudge pots obscured the target

area. One crew claimed a direct hit on a war ship in the harbor. Several ships were seen apparently leaving the harbor to escape the bombing. U-421 confirmed sunk.

SORTIES: 1 Total: 27

MISSION TIME: 8:30 Total: 131:15

NARRATIVE: The first time we came to Toulon we were on the right wing of our flight and the lead aircraft exploded. One minute he was there and the next he was gone. Other lead aircraft were targeted and shot down as well. This time we were the lead of our flight and nervous to be in that position. But we had a wonderful escort of P-38's and P-51's. Seventeen groups were over the target—more than 550 B-17's and B-24's. Such a tremendous force must have been awe inspiring to the comparatively defenseless people on the ground.

It seemed colder than usual. And the lead group took us in on the wrong axis and all groups made a wide circle for a second run on the target. This kept us in the flak too long. The flak was the most accurate I have seen. SAKINSHACK was holed but not seriously. I saw one B-24 explode with eight chutes opening. Another went down with three chutes opening. Our radio operator, Sgt. Shipe, said that on the radio he heard one B-24 throwing everything overboard to lighten the ship, up to and possibly including the heaviest crewmember.



15th Air Force heads to the target of the day 1944



Toulon Harbor, southern France 1944

Date: 2 May 1944

MISSION # 21 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Orbetello, Italy—Seaplane Base and Radar Station

SHIP: Jesse James ...808

ESCORT: none

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 18,000 feet.

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: none

FLAK: Moderate Volume, Inaccurate Aim, Heavy Caliber

RESULTS: Missed target. Our bombs fell in the harbor beside the town.

SORTIES: 1 Total: 28

MISSION TIME: 7:00 Total: 138:15

NARRATIVE: Month of May. Summer is just around the corner. Invasion soon, I'll bet. The primary target was Parma, Italy Marshalling Yard. Alternate targets were any active Marshalling Yard in North Italy except Florence and Rimini. We ran into overcast at 21,000 feet and dropped to 18,000 feet to get under it. The Colonel leading the wing lost us as he maneuvered under the clouds so we bombed a target of opportunity, a Seaplane Base and Radar Station at Orbetello, Italy. We were assigned a new ship and named it Jesse James after our pilot Robert James and the original outlaw from Clay County, Missouri. Thinking of all the people we have killed makes me feel like an outlaw.



Orbetello, Italy 1944

Date: 5 May 1944

MISSION # 22 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Ploesti, Romania—Marshalling Yard and Oil Refinery

SHIP: Jesse James ...808

ESCORT: Thirty P-47's escorted until the initial point of the bomb run. Thirty P-51's (31st Fighter Group) flew high cover over the target. Forty-six P-38's (82nd and 14th Fighter Groups) from thirty minutes after target to the Yugoslav coast.

BOMBS: 12 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 20,500 feet.

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: Fifteen to twenty ME-109's

FLAK: Intense Volume, Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber

RESULTS: Target was obscured by clouds but breaks in the cover allowed the bombardiers to make sighting. Our pattern was calculated to cover the marshalling yard and refinery.

Thirty minutes past the target a column of black smoke, extending to about 18,000 feet was observed, indicating a large oil fire—visible for two hundred miles.

SORTIES: 2 Total: 30

MISSION TIME: 8:00 Total: 146:15

NARRATIVE: Most of the 15th AAF made the raid. We had to face the flak of Ploesti today. Always rough. We were in the stomach-churning flak a long time. There was a lot of flak coming from guns placed in open fields outside the city limits where the unseen German gunners four miles below filled the sky around our formation with black shell bursts. Our formation was hit hard by enemy fighters and by flak. Every airplane in the formation was hit. Just as we started the left rally away from the target we were jumped by ME-109's who attacked at six o'clock out of the sun, singly and in pairs. Enemy fighters attacked through the flak because our escort wouldn't follow them into it.

Several B-24's and crews did not come back, including SHILAY-LEE (41-29239 of the 727th) and DEVIL'S DUCHESS (42-52094 of the 725th). JESSE JAMES had lots of holes, but we got back and my how sweet the ground is.



451st over Ploesti, Romania 5 May 1944

Date: 6 May 1944

MISSION # 23 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Pitesti, Romania—Marshalling Yard

SHIP: Jesse James ...808

ESCORT: P-51's and P-38's

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 20,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: Six ME-109's

FLAK: None at target. Some en route.

RESULT: Good. Marshalling yard completely covered and line leading northwest out of yard is out. Roundhouse hit. Oil cars in marshalling yard probably hit.

SORTIES: 2 Total: 32

MISSION TIME: 7:30 Total: 153:45

NARRATIVE: After yesterday's mission I didn't want to get back in JESSE JAMES and go again. But I did—so I wouldn't let the rest of the crew down. This mission was to support the Red Army. Our job was to cripple transport for reinforcement at the front. We dropped our bombs while flying along the tracks

instead of at an angle and for a long distance instead of in a concentrated pattern. We walked them straight down the rows of track, a distance of 5500 feet.

Compared to the day before, this one was a milk run—not much flak, only a few fighters and a good escort. However, one crew lost two engines and made it home only after throwing out everything possible.



Pitesti, Romania 6 May 1944

7 MAY 1944 – 22 MAY 1944

R and R leave on Capri

Our whole crew has completed at least twenty-five missions so we are eligible for leave on the fabled Isola di Capri at the entrance of the bay of Naples. For one war-free week we get to lie on the beaches of the idyllic little island, take a boat to the beautiful Blue Grotto, visit the Roman ruins, and sit at a sidewalk café sipping vino and eyeing the lovely signorinas.



Capri Grottos 1944

I saw some of Naples, but not much, because we went right through the town fast; but when we got to Capri; that's where I got to see the sights. It was a beautiful place. There was an English woman there, she had been there since 1929 and she knew the island well, she became our tour guide. Now, the island itself was nothing more than a little city sitting on top of a hill. From the waterfront, we took a tram up the side of the mountain and it clanked all the way to the top. She took us to the far north end and then pointed down at the shoreline, at the bottom of the

cliff, there were slabs of marble, beautiful marble that was set up like little rooms. They were the rooms that the Romans used for their bathhouses. In the days of the Romans, I imagine, it would have been really beautiful. A lot of what remained was crumbled. What remained up was beautiful. They had all the different olive groves and all kinds of grape vines. Then we went down to the shoreline and got into a boat. It was a rowboat, like our common rowboats we have here, and there were two of us plus the guide, a local Italian, rowing the boat that took us on a trip almost completely around the island. We went to a grotto, you can only get into it by boat, but you have to wait until the swell of the wave goes down for the opening, then you had to go in real fast, otherwise, you'd get pinned to the doorway. So, our guide would position us just outside and when the time was right, he told us to lie down; we had to lay down flat in the boat, and he would paddle like mad to get to the opening and get us through. Inside the grotto was the most beautiful scenery, sparkles, green, blue, all kinds of colors. It was magnificent in there ... beautiful. Then there were cafés in Capri where we all got drunk and acted like kids. We had our good times. Then, it was time to go back to reality and we went back.

Date: 23 May 1944

MISSION # 24 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Road Junction at Subiaco, Italy—Troop Support

SHIP: Jesse James ...808

ESCORT: P-51's and P-38's

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 19,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: none

FLAK: Moderate Volume, Accurate Aim, Medium Caliber at Pescara (5 Guns)

RESULT: Twelve aircraft dropped on primary target and twenty-five dropped on secondary target at Avezzano. Numerous hits on large building, blast damage in residential area, factory and probably damaged Magliani. Hits in town.

SORTIES: 1 Total: 33

MISSION TIME: 4:00 Total: 157:45

NARRATIVE: Our mission was in support of the front line ground forces in Italy who were pushing the enemy northward. The target was a highway junction at the foot of steep hill in a deep narrow valley. Ground maps had to be used instead of target charts. Crossing over a series of mountain ridges, the Group found its target despite an eight-tenths under cast. We did some poor bombing—missed the road and hit everything else.



Subiaco, Italy 23 May 1944

Date: 25 May 1944

MISSION # 25 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Carnoules, France—Marshalling Yard

SHIP: Jesse James ...808

ESCORT: Forty-eight P-38's of the 82nd Fighter Group

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 22,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: none

FLAK: none

RESULT: Direct hits on roundhouse, storage yard, east and west choke points, marshalling yard and tracks.

SORTIES: 1 Total: 34

MISSION TIME: 7:00 Total: 164:45

NARRATIVE: The Fifteenth Air Force suddenly swung to France for targets. We went to Carnoules—between Toulon and Nice. In the absence of both flak and fighters I am an antiquated yet still cold gunner. And with clear and visibility-unlimited weather, our second attack unit hit the target and the Group got 35 per cent of its bombs within 1,000 feet of the briefed aiming point on the marshalling yard and roundhouse.



Carnoules, France 25 May 1944

Date: 27 May 1944

MISSION # 26 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Salon De Provence, France—JU-88 Airdrome

SHIP: Jesse James ...808

ESCORT: Thirty P-38's, twenty P-47's, ten P-51's

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 22,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: Four ME-109's sighted in target area.

FLAK: Intense Volume, Very Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber

RESULT: Direct hits on hangars. Main taxiway on the east side was hit by a string. A canal, railroad tracks and a highway north of target were hit. An administration building was also hit.

SORTIES: 1 Total: 35

MISSION TIME: 8:30 Total: 173:15

NARRATIVE: This mission to France was different than the previous one. This time extremely accurate, heavy flak greeted the group at landfall on the French Coast. Flak flew at us and put holes in our ship. JESSE JAMES was hit on the bomb door and in between No. 1 and No. 2 engines. Not anything to worry about. This time the target was the airdrome at Salon de Provence. A nest of JU-88 aircraft there had been raiding shipping in the Mediterranean. We hit their airfield hard.



Salon de Provence, France 27 May 1944



15th Air Force B-24 near Nice, France May 1944

Date: 29 May 1944

MISSION # 27 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Wiener Neustadt, Austria—Wollersdorf Airdrome, aircraft manufacturing and servicing installations

SHIP: Jesse James ...808

ESCORT: Forty-seven P-38's (82nd and 14th Fighter Groups) up to Zeltweg and Fifty P-51's (31st Fighter Group) from Zeltweg, over target, and on withdrawal.

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 22,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: Ten ME-109's, twenty FW-190's, twenty to twenty-five ME-110's, ten to fifteen ME-210's & ten to fifteen JU-88's.

FLAK: Intense Volume, Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber over a large area at the target (86 guns). Encountered flak over Graz and Zagreb as well.

RESULT: Many hits on hangars. Probably destroyed. Factory installations severely damaged. Marshalling yard hit and both choke points cut. Nine single engine aircraft on ground probably destroyed. Highway cut by two bombs.

SORTIES: 2 Total: 37

MISSION TIME: 6:30 Total: 179:45

NARRATIVE: Today's mission was a tough one. The target was Wiener-Neustadt—lots of flak. BODACIOIUS CRITTER #2 (42-78157 of the 727th) cracked up on the runway on takeoff. No one was hurt. Over the target the sky was filled with all types of fighters. Saw them firing rockets, etc. P-51's claimed 56 planes. No enemy fighters came close enough for us to fire at. Enemy aircraft were flying through their own flak. I saw one two-engine fighter go down and explode; two parachutes coming out just before hitting ground. I saw one B-24 explode and one go down over target with five chutes coming out.

Thirteen groups were over the target. Wiener-Neustadt really burned. I hope it will be a long time before we have to return to this target. I was scared stiff. I really dislike the flak. JESSE JAMES picked up some mean flak holes. One very near the ball turret.



Wiener Neustadt, Austria 29 May 1944



451st over Wiener Neustadt, Austria 29 May 1944

Date: 30 May 1944

MISSION # 28 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Wels, Austria—Aircraft Factory

SHIP: Jesse James ...808

ESCORT: Thirty-seven P-38's (82nd Fighter Group) to Zeltweg then twelve P-38's (14th Fighter Group) and sixty P-51's (31st Fighter Group) over target

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 22,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: Six ME-109's and three FW-190's hit group ahead with rockets.

FLAK: Enroute at Graz, Zeltweg, Linz, and Styer from angle or slight distance.

RESULT: Target completely covered with a smothering concentration leaving oil fires and smoke aplenty. Target believed to be completely destroyed.

SORTIES: 2 Total: 39

MISSION TIME: 7:00 Total: 186:45

NARRATIVE: Wels is southwest of Linz, Austria. The flak was not bad but another group away from us sure did have it plenty bad. A group in back of us; well, one of the B-24's was blown to bits. Enemy aircraft didn't attack any of our

ships. Our escort of P-38's and P-51's sure do keep them away. The missions are going by fast but not fast enough. The good Lord always brings us back.



Wels, Austria 30 May 1944

Date: 2 June 1944

MISSION # 29 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Szolnok, Hungary—Marshalling Yard

SHIP: Jesse James ...808

ESCORT: Forty P-38's, Twenty P-51's

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 22,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: none

FLAK: Slight Volume, Inaccurate Aim (4 guns)

RESULT: Six strings crossed main marshalling yard cutting both choke points and several central points. A large percentage of rolling stock with freight probably destroyed or seriously damaged. Overhead highway bridge probably destroyed by direct hits.

SORTIES: 2 Total: 41

MISSION TIME: 7:00 Total: 193:45

NARRATIVE: We bombed rail yards, and I mean bombed. Got us up at 1:45 am. No sleep. But we got back at noon. All went well today. No fighters. Watched three or four locomotives attempting to beat bombs out of marshalling yard. They sure picked up steam fast, but only one of them managed to keep ahead of the bombs all the way out and made it safely.



Szolnok, Hungary 2 June 1944 (from 22,000 ft.)



Szolnok, Hungary 2 June 1944 (from 15,500 ft.)



15th Air Force over Szolnok, Hungary 2 June 1944

Date: 7 June 1944

MISSION # 30 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Antheor, France—Viaduct

SHIP: Jesse James ...808

ESCORT: none

BOMBS: 5 x 1000 lb. General Purpose from 22,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: none

FLAK: Moderate to Intense Volume, Very Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber (16 guns)

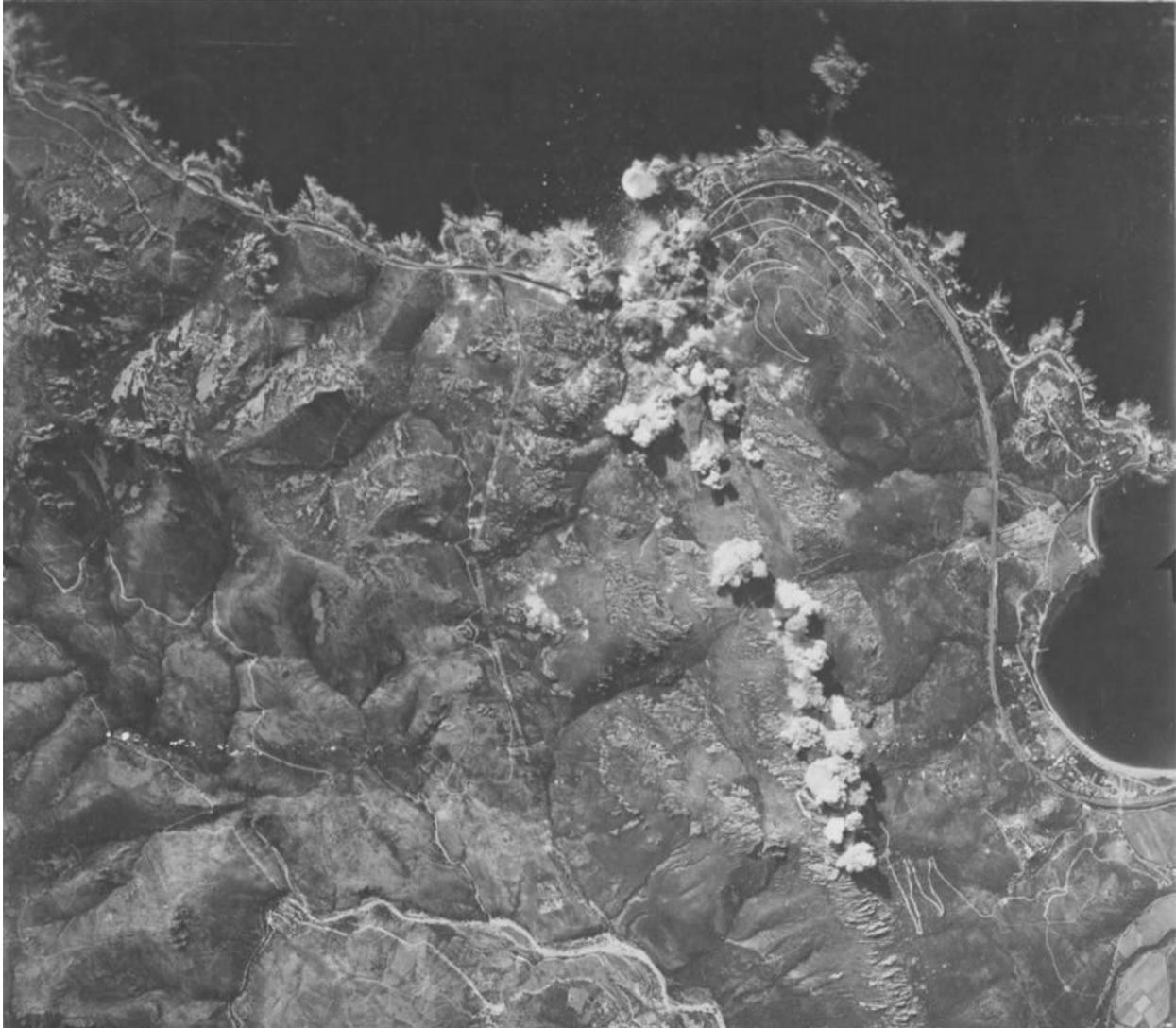
RESULT: Coastal railroad cut east and west of target. Hits near the target.

SORTIES: 1 Total: 42

MISSION TIME: 7:00 Total: 200:45

NARRATIVE: Today we had hot coffee and sandwiches to take with us—much better than K-Rations. One plane landed at Corsica. Crew is OK. Our job was to hit a railroad bridge on the southern coast of France. As the wind noise changed with a whoosh when the bomb bay doors opened I was thinking that there was too much

flak just to protect one bridge. And as JESSE JAMES surged up when the bombs were released, riding up and down in my turret, I was hoping that the bombs stringing earthward would hit the target and help by cutting off part of the enemies' transportation. We were fairly successful.



Antheor, France, June 1944

Date: 10 June 1944

MISSION # 31 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Porto Marghera, Italy—Oil Storage and Refinery

SHIP: Jesse James ...808

ESCORT: Forty-eight P-38's and P-51's

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 20,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: none

FLAK: Moderate to Intense Volume, Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber (20 guns)

RESULT: Excellent. Bomb bursts in target area. Believed target entirely destroyed.

SORTIES: 1 Total: 43

MISSION TIME: 5:00 Total: 205:45

NARRATIVE: Flak especially rough on our low flight. **JESSE JAMES** picked up at least sixteen holes. **LONESOME POLECAT** (42-52114 of the 726th) was hit by four direct bursts along fuselage, doing considerable damage to ship and resulting in them having to ditch in the Adriatic. Two crewmembers were lost at sea and the rest were injured.



451st over Porto Marghera, Italy 10 June 1944



451st bombs falling toward Porto Marghera, Italy 10 June 1944



Porto Marghera, Italy 10 June 1944

Date: 13 June 1944

MISSION # 32 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Munich, Germany—Neuauibing Airdrome

(Bombed Oberpfaffenhofen Airdrome as secondary target just southwest of Munich)

SHIP: Jesse James ...808

ESCORT: P-38's and P-51's (31st & 325th Fighter Groups) and P-47's (332nd Fighter Group—Red Tails)

BOMBS: 48 x 100 lb. Incendiaries from 22,500 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: 95 of all types. 30 encountered. Attacked six abreast. Came in high from 12 o'clock, dove under formation, split into three's and then attacked from 3 and 9 o'clock level.

FLAK: Very Intense Volume, Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber beginning at about Hallbergmoos and to the target and within a 15 mile radius of Munich (286 guns).

Flak guns were mounted on railroad cars at strategic locations. Flak bursts were black.

RESULT: Smoke and cloud completely obscured target so we bombed another airdrome farther southwest of Munich—Oberpfaffenhofen. Impossible to assess damage due to smoke. A few direct hits on aircraft parked on field.

SORTIES: 2 Total: 45

MISSION TIME: 8:00 Total: 213:45

NARRATIVE: There was the surge of panic at the intercom call “Fighters, 10 o’clock low.” We were attacked by fighters while on the bomb run. I let go a few bursts at them but they didn’t come in close. There were several other 15th AAF groups over Munich. A ship in a group ahead of us was hit by fighters, exploding its incendiary bombs and sending it down in a mass of flames with parts scattered all over the sky. Area was full of enemy fighters. We were in flak area for the longest time to date. Flak was bursting from 15,000 to 30,000 feet. Flak was terrible. The good Lord was with us again. We got a big flak hole in the plane. It tore through the hydraulic system of my ball turret and soaked me with hydraulic fluid. The waist gunners had to manually crank up my turret and get me out. I will never forget the acrid smells of cordite, 100-octane gasoline and hydraulic fluid. I’ve never been so cold—44 degrees below zero and wet. Surely didn’t want to go today. Just so we got home. On our way back some guns from shore took shots at us. Made it back okay.



15th Air Force crosses the Alps into Germany, 1944.



451st in heavy flak, 1944.



451st B-24 struggles home with battle damage, 1944.

Date: 23 June 1944

MISSION # 33 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Giurgiu, Romania—Oil Refinery and Storage

SHIP: Jesse James ...808

ESCORT: Fifty P-38's and P-47's (332nd Fighter Group—Red Tails)

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. Incendiaries

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: none

FLAK: Moderate Volume, Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber (36 guns)

RESULT: Hits on oil storage tanks. Four of them were on fire. Many hits in and around target area.

SORTIES: 2 Total: 47

MISSION TIME: 8:00 Total: 221:45

NARRATIVE: Target was an oil refinery and storage south of Bucharest. Took up a new type of incendiary bomb. Had bad weather all the way over. The clouds were thick. The formations just separated in all directions. This was really

something to sweat out. We couldn't see 10 feet away from the ship. We couldn't see the plane next to us. There were 200 planes in there with us. Just prayed that we would get through it. B-17's were with B-24's but after a while we got into formation. We hit the target all right. Flak was heavy and accurate. No fighters were seen. Another long cold mission. One B-24 from our squadron, AMERICAN BEAUTY (41-29530), didn't come back.



Giurgiu, Romania 23 June 1944.

Date: 28 June 1944

MISSION # 34 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Chitila, Romania—Marshalling Yard

SHIP: Jesse James ...808

ESCORT: 80 P-38's 35 P-51's

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 22,000 feet

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: 2 ME-109's, 1 FW-190 sighted.

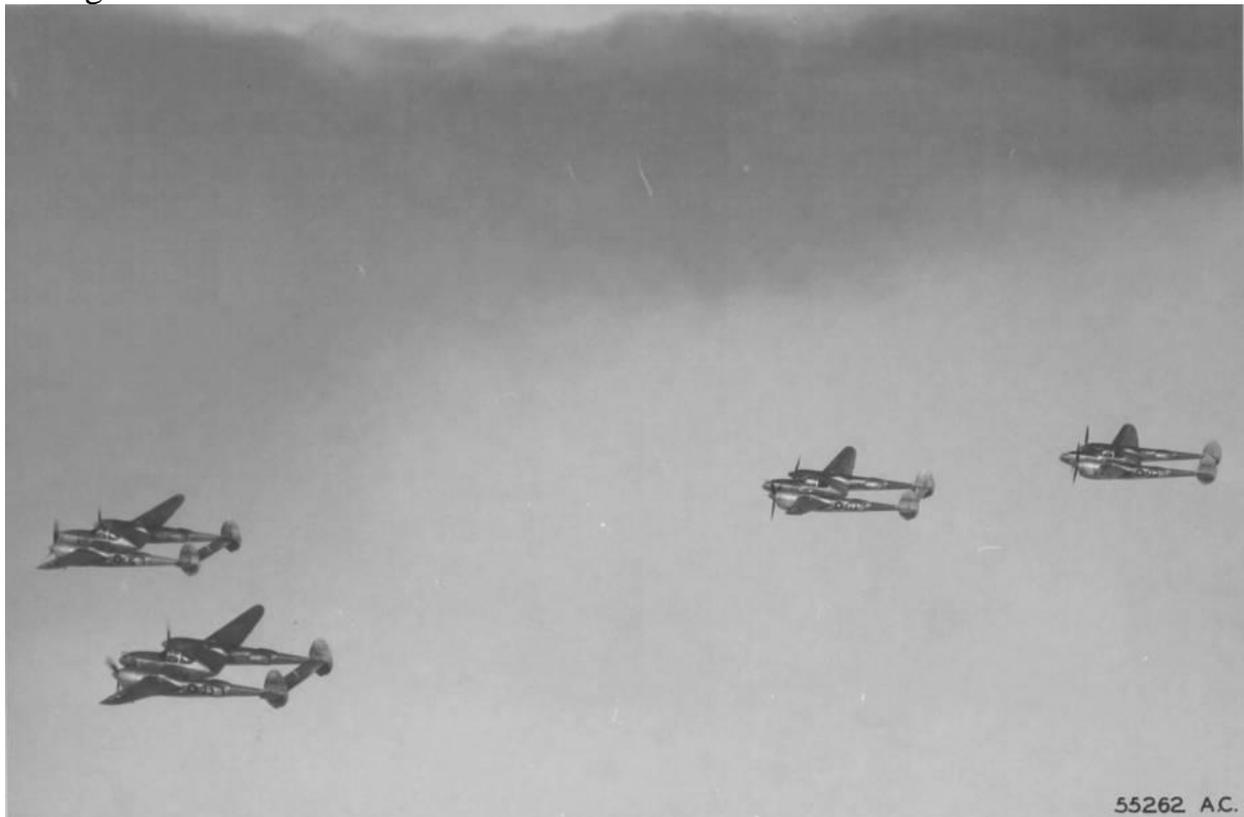
FLAK: Moderate Volume, Inaccurate Aim, Heavy Caliber at target (139 guns)

RESULT: Main marshalling yard and choke point hit. Many goods and wagons destroyed. Primary target missed.

SORTIES: 2 Total: 49

MISSION TIME: 8:00 Total: 229:45

NARRATIVE: Not an extra rough one but it was a plenty long trip. Our job was to cut the railroad lines connecting Bucharest and Ploesti—the Chitila Marshalling Yard at Bucharest. Bad weather was experienced en route to the target area. The weather cleared at the target but there was intense haze. Our escort really kept the enemy fighters away—only a couple of enemy aircraft sighted. There was a great deal of flak in the target area but not too accurate so we escaped without much damage.



P-38 escort (little friends), 1944.

Date: 2 July 1944

MISSION # 35 Base: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Budapest, Hungary—Rakos Marshalling Yard

SHIP: Jesse James ...808

ESCORT: Twenty-five to thirty P-51's (31st Fighter Group) flew high cover over the target area. Twenty-five to thirty P-38's met us after the bomb run to escort us back.

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 21,000 feet.

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: Nine ME-109's observed when approaching target area. Three FW-190's observed over target.

FLAK: Intense Volume, Inaccurate Aim, Heavy Caliber

RESULT: Hit target. Marshalling yard on fire as we left target area.

SORTIES: 2 Total: 51

MISSION TIME: 7:00 Total: 236:45

NARRATIVE: I folded myself up into the ball turret and rode in the almost fetal position for the last time. I spent endless hours at the eye-straining sky watching that has been my main occupation—looking for the black specks of enemy fighters in the distance, but always hoping to not see them. We had a very good escort. Enemy aircraft did not attack our group. Not too rough, but I sweated it out more than usual being my last mission. FINITO! Sure glad it's over.



Budapest, Hungary 2 July 1944.



451st in flak over Budapest, Hungary 2 July 1944



451st over Budapest, Hungary 2 July 1944.

Date: 7 July 1944

BASE: Castelluccio dei Sauri

TARGET: Blechhammer, Germany—North Synthetic Oil Refinery

SHIP: Jesse James ...808

ESCORT: 40 P-38's and 20 P-51's. The 332nd Fighter Group—Red Tails—failed to rendezvous probably because the 332nd Fighter Group followed plan B and the 451st followed plan A which took us to Blechhammer instead of Vienna, with a different rendezvous time. Apparently the 332nd Fighter Group did not receive the Fifteenth Air Force message to go with plan A.

BOMBS: 10 x 500 lb. General Purpose from 22,300 feet.

ENEMY AIRCRAFT: Seventy-five encountered. FW-190's, JU-88's, ME-110's, ME-109's, & ME-210's attacked.

FLAK: Intense Volume, Accurate Aim, Heavy Caliber at target.

RESULT: Smoke pots covered the target area. The bombs were dropped by pathfinder (radar "mickey" ship). Photographs are poor. Not much damage is believed to be done to target. Some bombs dropped on marshalling yard in Kosel area.

NARRATIVE: Flak and loads of fighters. The enemy fighters were encountered south of the target area, after the bomb run. They were flying in two groups. The group with ME-109's led the assault, trying to decoy the P-38 escort from the bombers. The P-38's chased them away and then returned to the bombers but couldn't stay because they had cast off their belly tanks during the chase. Garland Jarvis, the pilot in #4 position, 2nd Flight of the Group saw aircraft #808 (in #5 position) attacked by ME-109's causing large holes in the right and left fins and one wing. The wing caught fire and was burning fiercely when he saw 10 men bail out. A few minutes later, after another attack the plane burst into flames. Four of the crew evaded capture and returned to base. The other six became POW's.



Blechhammer, Germany (occupied Poland) 1944



15th Air Force B-24 going down, two airmen coming out, 1944.